

## BOOK REVIEW

MARK FLANAGAN and TONY KIRKHAM. 2005. **Plants From the Edge of the World: New Explorations in the Far East.** (ISBN 0-88192-676-0, hbk.). Timber Press Inc. 133 S.W. Second Ave, Suite 450, Portland, OR 97204-3527, U.S.A. and Timber Press, 2 Station Rd, Swavsey, Cambridge CB4 5QJ, U.K. (Orders: www.timberpress.com, mail@timberpress.com, 503-227-2878, 1-800-327-5680, 503-227-3070 fax). \$39.95, 312 pp., color maps, numerous color photos, 7 1/4" x 9 1/4".

This engaging book chronicles the authors' plant-collecting expeditions in the Far East in the aftermath of the Great Storm (Hurricane Hugo) of October 1987, which devastated Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, London and Wakehurst Place in West Sussex. During the subsequent assessment of damage and inventory of the collections, it became clear that there were large gaps in both the taxonomic and geographic representation of the world's temperate woodlands, especially those from the edge of eastern Asia. A plant collecting program was developed targeting areas of the world that were under-represented in Kew's collections. Joint expeditions to Sichuan, China were mounted by others; the authors found themselves in charge of expeditions to some very remote areas in Korea, Taiwan, eastern Russia and Japan.

Plants and hunting them form the heart of the book, but the story is as much an adventure tale as one about botany. Well written, never dry, often exciting, sometimes hilarious, the book allows the reader to experience events in an immediate way through the use of first-person narrative. From their eight-hour climb to a Korean mountain top to crossing a storm-swollen river in Russia hand-in-hand, the authors keep the reader's attention. They eat sandpiper stew, but pass on pigs' ears. They savor beer in several memorable places. They look more kindly on Spam after days in Todong where the smell of drying squid permeates the air. And on every page they describe the plants they are hunting and the way they are hunting them. They pursue their goals though rain, hail, heat, cold and dark of night, always with a sense of humor. Think of Michael Palin crossed with a postman-botanist and you get the idea.

The final chapter details what has happened at Kew and Wakehurst Place as the collections have been planted and grown. The book also includes homage to those who went before them at Kew, notably E.H. Wilson, in whose footsteps the authors found themselves walking as they gathered seed in the species-rich temperate forests on the "edge of the world."

Mark Flanagan is currently Keeper of the Gardens in Windsor Great Park, with responsibilities for the world-renowned Savill and Valley Gardens and the gardens at Frogmore. Tony Kirkham is Head of the Arboretum and Horticultural Services at the Royal Botanic Garden, Kew, where he cares for the existing heritage landscape and woody plant collections and maintains the integrity and development of the living scientific plant collections. Both travel extensively for plant collecting trips, lecture and publish — Penny McCook, volunteer, Botanical Research Institute of Texas, 509 Pecan Street, Fort Worth, TX 76102-4060, U.S.A.